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SUBJECT: GREEK FRIGATE COMPLETES EU ANTI-PIRACY MISSION

¶1. The Hellenic Navy frigate Psara is winding down a 4-month deployment in the Gulf of Aden as part of a European Union naval force battling piracy off Somalia. April 4 marks the end of Greek Commodore Andionios Papaioannou's four-month tenure as the first tactical commander of the EU's first naval mission. Dubbed Operation Atalanta, the mission is led by Britain, from a headquarters in Northwood, near London.

¶2. During Commodore Papaioannou and the HS Psara's 4-month deployment to combat piracy and protect commercial shipping in one of the world's busiest sea lanes, the Greek warship intervened on two separate occasions to thwart Somali pirate skiffs. On March 29, Psara intercepted a pirate craft soon after its crew had unsuccessfully attempted to board a German-flagged tanker. Greek commandos arrested several Somali suspects, whom they later turned over to a German frigate. On April 1, Psara again intervened to assist a Norwegian freighter that had just successfully evaded the pirates. Greek commandos again detained a Somali crew, whom they later released for lack of evidence.

¶3. Comment: Operation Atalanta has offered an opportunity to the Hellenic Navy to operate in a top role of a critical multinational command environment and hone its high seas patrol and escort skills. It also offered Greece the opportunity to exercise successful naval diplomacy, including with Chinese Admiral Du Jing Tsien, Admiral-in-Command of Chinese TG 169 Somalia task force. On March 20, the Chinese admiral paid a visit to Psara and met with Commodore Papaioannou and Psara's officers, stressing the "excellent" relations between Greece and China, and praising the Hellenic Navy's anti-piracy mission. End comment

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